



Wounded Spirits, Ailing Hearts 3 Health and Life Written Video Transcript

Physical health problems are common among combat veterans. Native American Vietnam veterans are no exception.

I had headaches and I tried to—(the sleeping still) didn't come about and [00:00.20.00] just sometimes I just feel like, I mean, I'm aching in my back [00:28] on my feet. And nothing, I just, I mean, I couldn't exercise myself to better myself.

The American Indian Vietnam Veterans Project showed [00:00.40.00] that Southwest and Northern Plains veterans report more physical health problems and think of themselves as being in worse health than do white, Black, or Hispanic veterans. PTSD symptoms affect both. The more PTSD symptoms a veteran has, the greater his health problems. [00:01.00.00] The worse he feels about his health the more likely he is to seek medical care. For primary care providers there are clear implications about this connection between physical health and PTSD. We'll come to those in a moment. [00:01.20.00]

Veterans with PTSD experience the ordinary problems we all do with everyday life but they have more trouble dealing with them.

Within 28 years I've had 21 jobs and each one of them lasted approximately a year. [00:01.40.00] On average, a year. So, the rest of the time, I was unemployed.

I struggle on a daily basis with my family to be a family. It's hard to explain. It's just there.

My husband was kind of abusive to me, but never to his children. [00:02.00.00] He never, never laid a hand on them or even used any harsh word on them or even (threw) them or anything like that. And I asked him, I said, "Why, you know, why are you like this to them? You know, you're like a lamb but to me, you know, you just expect me to, you know, to be everything." And then he says, "Well, it takes me back to Vietnam, [00:02.20.00] you know. Over there, they used the kids, the families, you know, to run behind. And here, I'm not going to do that."

Participants in the American Indian Vietnam Veterans Project frequently told us they have trouble finishing school, finding a job, and holding a job. They don't have sufficient money to live on. They have difficult family relationships [00:02.40.00] and they get in trouble with the law. Veterans with PTSD have the same problems, only worse. Combat exposure is not the only risk factor for PTSD. A witness to war can relive the horror for a lifetime. Listen [00:03.00.00] to this Native American woman veteran who cared for wounded soldiers during the Korean War.



I never encountered anything like that because I always thought that everything elsewhere was in harmony with everything, [00:03.20.00] you know. But then you learn. You know, you feel for the veterans, how they feel, what they think of themselves. You listen to what they have to say. And they cry, you know. [00:03.40.00] And you just have to sit there and listen to all the hardships that they went through. And then you begin to feel how they really feel.

While combat exposure is the [00:04.00.00] predominant cause of PTSD among Vietnam veterans other factors influence how severe PTSD may become and how long it may last. Peter has examples from his clinical experience that he can share with us.

The Indian and Native servicemen I've treated frequently mention family and community support as both a blessing [00:04.20.00] and a burden. Some Native families found the Vietnam War difficult to understand because it didn't directly threaten their lives. Those family members couldn't relate to what happened to their sons, fathers, and husbands overseas. So, when veterans came home they didn't [00:04.40.00] believe most people cared about them, even their families. Ironically, the nature of PTSD, that is the tendency to shut down emotion and explode in anger, meant the veteran often rejected even the most sincere offers of help and understanding.

My anger [00:05.00.00] just got out of control. I have hurt people, even my own relatives. And all I have to show for it is, I guess physically, is a beat up body [00:05.20.00] and some of my own relatives won't even talk to me to this day, you know. Because (of the anger during the) drinking.

I was angry all the time. I don't know why. When I came back from the service, I mean, Vietnam, I had [00:05.40.00] that anger all the time, though. Every day. I don't know what's wrong. I didn't know what I was angry for, though. (Soon) my wife and my children noticed it more. I was always angry. From there, my family didn't—kind of don't bother me. They stay away from me, (you know). [00:06.00.00] Then this—I have a hard life with my family, though, (just giving all this) anger, you know.

[End of audio]

